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- 3.—*On Actors and the Art of Acting.* By GEORGE HENRY LEWES. (Amateur Series.) New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1878. 12mo, pp. 237.

THIS is the most important book in English on the subject to which it relates (indeed, we may say the only important book) that has appeared for many years. Mr. Lewes is not merely an "old stager" familiar with the best acting of the last forty years, but an accomplished dramatic critic as well; and we could not wish anything better for our stage than that every actor connected with it might take to heart the valuable hints contained in this book. It is a collection of ephemeral papers on noted actors, from Edmund Kean to Salvini, with essays on the French, German, and Spanish stage, and some points connected with the art of acting, republished and expanded. It makes its appearance at a time, as Mr. Lewes frankly says, of dramatic degradation—a degradation peculiar to no country—but most marked in those of Anglo-Saxon origin. Of course he knows little or nothing of the drama in America, but almost everything that he has to say applies to this country as well as England, except, possibly, that we have made more vigorous attempts to keep alive what he calls the "poetic drama," or, in other words, tragedy and high comedy, than have been made in England. But these attempts, as witness the failure of Mr. Edwin Booth to maintain a theatre devoted exclusively, or mainly, to Shakespearean plays, and of Mr. Lester Wallack to keep alive English comedy at another, have not been crowned with success. We are overwhelmed in the rushing tide of French adaptations, and we may candidly admit that, with their resources, the managers do better to give us these than fine English plays poorly acted.

We have but little criticism to offer as to the theories on the subject of acting advanced by Mr. Lewes. Most of them are at least as old as Hamlet's "advice to the players," and many of them would, in any flourishing period of the drama, be justly considered trite. That we read them with a refreshing sense of novelty and conviction, is one more proof of the degradation of the stage which Mr. Lewes laments. His remarks about "natural acting" are particularly true, and we wish that our actors who are engaged in studying French models would take them to heart. Every real actor knows that a simple imitation on the stage of what the actor believes would be the behavior natural to the situation off the stage is impossible. It is not an imitation of real life that we

go to the theatre to see ; but something that, under the conditions of the stage (e. g., the presence of an audience, and the actual knowledge on the part of everybody that it is all unreal), shall produce that semblance of reality which we call a theatrical illusion. The notion that this is to be got by an actor's turning his back to the audience, or talking in the same tone he would use in the street, is a great mistake. All that Mr. Lewes has to say on this subject is excellent. In reading his book, however, it has occurred to us that he has not made sufficiently clear the distinction between the various meanings which the word "natural" may have when applied to acting. It may mean according to the nature of the character represented ; it may mean according to that nature *under some* of the conditions ; it may mean according to the character represented *under all the conditions* ; it may mean according to the nature of the speaker himself. In the case he refers to, for instance, the appearance of the ghost in "Hamlet," to say that the manner of the actor who takes the part is "natural," may mean that the speaker thinks that his behavior is exactly what his own would be under the circumstances ; or that his behavior is exactly what he imagines Hamlet's would be in meeting a ghost—or what he imagines Hamlet's would be on meeting the ghost of his father ; or he may mean that the *Hamlet* of Shakespeare, meeting the ghost, under all the given circumstances of the play, would behave just as the actor does. If competent judges form the last impression, we call the acting good ; if not, it is certainly bad ; though it may clearly, in some sense, be "natural" in all the supposed cases. This may seem like merely verbal criticism ; but in talking about the drama, as in talking about any other art, criticism is impossible without an exact use of language. In conclusion, we may say that we have found every line of Mr. Lewes's book interesting and instructive, and hope that its success may lead him in future editions to enlarge and develop it into a systematic treatise on the art. We are satisfied that such a work as this would do something to lift the English drama out of the slough in which it is now lying.

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- 4.—*Thoreau: His Life and Aims. A Study.* By H. A. PAGE, author of "Life of Thomas De Quincey," "Memoir of Hawthorne," etc. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co. 1877. 24mo, pp. x.-234.

TILL within a few years, Mr. Page tells us in his preface, the name of Thoreau stood to him for "morbid sentiment, weak rebellion, and